



## **Beaver Dam Wash NCA and Red Cliffs NCA Proposed RMP and St. George Field Office Proposed RMP Amendment/FEIS Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What action is the BLM taking?**

The Utah Bureau of Land Management – St. George Field Office is releasing the Proposed Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for the Red Cliffs and the Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Areas (NCA) and a proposed amendment to the St. George Field Office RMP, along with the associated Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

### **Why did BLM develop the Resource Management Plans?**

Congress established the NCAs in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, which directed the BLM to develop comprehensive management plans for the two areas. The legislation also modified OHV designations and required the BLM to identify areas where biological conservation and restoration are a priority in areas outside of the NCAs. These changes require the 1999 St. George Field Office RMP be amended.

### **How did the BLM engage the public in developing the Proposed RMPs?**

The BLM initiated planning efforts with scoping from May 10-July 19, 2010, including public meetings in St. George, Hurricane and Salt Lake City, Utah and in Mesquite, NV. Public comments were taken on the draft NCA RMPs and St. George Field Office RMP amendment from July 15-November 16, 2015. More than 6,000 comments were received. The comment period was extended by 30 days, allowing the public 120 days to review and comment on the draft plans. Three public meetings on the draft plans were held and office hours were extended to provide opportunities for the public to look at the drafts before the comment period closed. The comments helped shape the Proposed RMPs.

### **Were the state and local governments consulted?**

The state of Utah, Washington County (Utah) and Mohave County (Arizona) accepted invitations as cooperating agencies and were consulted with and involved from the start of the planning process in 2010. St. George and other Washington County towns and cities were also consulted and involved through the Washington County's cooperating agency status. The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah and Shivwits Band declined official cooperating agency status, however, the Shivwits Band Tribal Chair participated in alternative development meetings and both groups contributed comments and suggestions throughout the process.

### **Is the BLM's Preferred Alternative in the 2015 Draft RMPs and RMP Amendment the one that was selected?**

The management goals, objectives and actions in the Proposed RMPs announced today are different from those of the BLM's Preferred Alternative in the 2015 Draft EIS. The proposed plans are a combination of the analyzed alternatives as well as information received from public comments and feedback from local, state and federal agencies. The plans reflect careful consideration of the issues raised through the analysis of the 2015 Draft EIS and public and stakeholder comments.

### **What decisions are being made?**

The Proposed RMPs/FEIS are not decision documents. After the 30-day protest period, a Governor's 60-day consistency review of the FEIS, and resolution of any protests, the BLM will prepare three Records of Decision that will be signed by the BLM-Utah State Director approving the NCA RMPs and St. George RMP Amendment. When the Records of Decision are signed, an implementation plan will be developed and future project-level decisions will not only be based on the new RMPs, but will also include further public involvement through the NEPA process before final decisions.

### **What are the key elements of the St. George Field Office RMP Amendment?**

This amendment will guide management in two major categories as directed by Congress in OPLMA:

- The amendment identifies areas where biological conservation and restoration are a priority. In the Final EIS the areas proposed for protection are three new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern to protect and restore native plant species that are listed as threatened and endangered by the US Fish & Wildlife Service.
- The amendment updates and modifies OHV area designations so that a separate Comprehensive Travel and Transportation Plan can be completed. OHV area designations include *Open to cross-country travel*, *Limited to designated routes*, and *Closed to motorized travel* as established by law and agency policy. The majority of the public lands in Washington County are proposed to be managed as *Limited to designated routes* outside of congressionally-designated wilderness and National Conservation Areas. The Sand Mountain OHV area is proposed to remain *Open to cross-country travel*.

### **What are the key elements of the Proposed RMPs/FEIS for the Beaver Dam Wash and Red Cliffs National Conservation Areas:**

- Protection for diverse threatened and endangered plant and animal species and critical habitats, including the Mojave desert tortoise, Southwestern willow flycatcher, and native fish of the Virgin River system;
- Management actions to reduce the threat of wildfires and restore fire-damaged landscapes;
- Development of trails and other facilities to provide for sustainable recreation experiences;
- Protection and interpretation of important heritage resources;
- Protection for the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, through Beaver Dam Wash NCA, while providing for high quality trail-related recreational experiences;

### **Why is the Mojave Desert tortoise so important?**

In 2009, Congress designated the two NCAs and identified that the BLM was to manage the public lands of the NCAs to “conserve, protection, and enhance” diverse resource values, including threatened and endangered species. Both NCAs support populations of the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise and include a majority of the designated critical habitat for this listed species in Washington County. Desert tortoise populations have declined throughout the Mojave Desert eco-region, due to disease and habitat loss to overgrazing, urban area growth and development, and catastrophic wildfires. The Proposed RMPs identify management actions to conserve and protect desert tortoise populations and its critical habitat, by reducing the threats of wildfires, restoring damaged habitats with native species that benefit tortoises, and managing land uses and authorized activities to assist the recovery and delisting of this threatened species.

The Red Cliffs NCA comprises 70% of the land base of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, the mitigation reserve for Washington County’s Habitat Conservation Plan that allows development on private and state lands in critical tortoise habitat to occur without the need for project-specific consultations with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Will any private, municipal, or state lands be impacted by the Proposed RMPs?**

All management goals, objectives, and actions identified in the Proposed RMPs apply only to BLM-managed lands within the NCAs. Non-federal lands within the NCAs could be acquired by the BLM in the future, but only from willing sellers and only to further the conservation purposes of the NCAs.

### **Did the BLM address the “northern transportation route” in the Proposed RMP planning process as required by the OPLMA?**

OPLMA requires the BLM to identify one or more alternatives for a “northern transportation route in the County” as part of a comprehensive travel management plan and in consultation with Washington County, the City of St. George, and other local governments. Once the Records of Decision for the Proposed RMPs are signed, the BLM will prepare this more specific travel plan in close cooperation with the state, county and city of St. George. The travel plan will consider a northern transportation route as required by OPLMA.

### **Would the Red Cliffs Proposed RMP allow the northern transportation route to be constructed?**

Although the Proposed RMP for Red Cliffs NCA does not designate a corridor, it would designate an *avoidance area* wide enough to accommodate a northern route. An *avoidance area* is where new rights-of-way are not encouraged but could possibly be granted if certain conditions are met. In this case, any route must meet criteria specified in the Proposed RMP and be consistent with OPLMA’s conservation purpose for the NCA. Designation of a corridor in the RMP would have been inconsistent with the Washington County Habitat

Conservation Plan and with OPLMA's direction to only allow uses that further the purposes Congress established for the area, including protecting threatened or endangered species located in the NCA.

**Will existing rights-of-way be revoked or impacted by management proposed in the Proposed RMPs?**

Existing rights-of-way for water lines, power transmission lines, roads, and communication sites will remain valid, and these facilities will continue to be operated and maintained, as described in the terms and conditions of the specific rights-of-way grants.

**Will the BLM take any private, municipal, or state surface or ground water rights by implementing any proposed management actions in the Proposed RMPs?**

Any proposed management action related to water rights would comply with the State of Utah's water rights system. In the Proposed RMPs, the BLM could purchase water from willing sellers for use in campgrounds and visitor facilities if consistent with state law.

**Are there restrictions on Recreational Target Shooting?**

The Preferred Alternative in the 2015 Draft included a prohibition on recreational target designated critical habitat for the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise in the Beaver Dam Wash NCA. After discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and carefully considering public comments, the BLM decided that any potential adverse effects from target shooting could be addressed with help from the target shooting community by being safe and considerate when shooting, picking up casings and targets, and not allowing "target trash" sites to develop. Therefore, that provision was removed from the Proposed RMP.

**Is livestock grazing in the Beaver Dam Wash NCA reduced?**

The Draft Preferred Alternative analyzed in the 2015 Draft EIS maintained the current acreage but reduced animal unit months (AUM) by about one third to better reflect the current use levels. After consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and carefully considering public comments, the BLM did not propose to reduce AUMs in the Beaver Dam Wash Proposed RMP.

**Why is OHV travel in the Bull Valley Mountains being proposed to be limited to designated routes?**

The Bull Valley Mountains open area is not consistent with the BLM's national strategy for OHV use because the mountainous terrain, deep drainages, and heavily forested slopes do not allow for safe and unregulated cross country travel by motorized vehicles. Throughout the lands managed by the St. George Field Office, there are 2,298 miles of roads and trails available for motorized use. The 21,000 acre Sand Mountain OHV area remains open to cross country travel.

**Will condors be released in the NCAs?**

There are no current plans to release condors in either NCA. As with any special status species, the Proposed RMPs allow for reintroduction of condors if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determines it would be beneficial to the species and coordination is in place with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and local governments.

**What happened to the Bull Valley Mountains Multi-Species Management Area?**

Following a review of the public comments on the 2015 draft EIS, further coordination with the cooperating agencies, and consideration of BLM management and consideration of BLM management direction the BLM decided sufficient protections will be in place to accomplish the landscape level goals of maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat and migration corridors. An important factor in the decision is that the Proposed St. George RMP Amendment would change the OHV designation from "open" to "limited to designated routes" in order to better protect crucial mule deer range.